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THE EFFECT OF CLUB WORK IN THE SOUTH

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In considering our subject we must be careful to remember that club work as now organized and federated is but a child. The State Federations throughout the South vary in age from four to twelve years.

Fifteen years ago the only clubs in existence among the women of the South were those formed for recreation, or for study among congenial friends or neighbors.

Women met then, as many of them do still, to study a favorite author and discuss his shades of meaning, without a thought of any responsibility beyond the home, church, and circle of friends. Warmhearted, and generous by nature, cases of need brought to their individual knowledge were kindly cared for, but no women's clubs had as yet assumed any part in the work of properly systematized social improvement.

There was no sudden rush of awakening, but the increase of railroad facilities and the consequent travel, combined with the wider dissemination of the daily paper, brought the impulse of the outside world even into remote villages. The coming of the telephone, and the rural free delivery of mail have not taken women away from their homes but have brought the wide world into close touch with the life of the family.

Women of intellectual keenness in the South could not be left out of the awakening of the women of the whole country to a realization of the responsibility which they properly had in the condition of their fellow-women and of the children.

Virginia, which might naturally have been expected to lead off in this work, is the only Southern State without a Federation of Women's Clubs, but individual clubs in that State, doing excellent work are undoubtedly the forerunners of a strong federation.

By a requirement of its constitution concerning the joining any

other organization, the Alabama Federation of Women's Clubs has not yet become a member of the General Federation, but it works along similar lines with the other federations and is considered one with them.

In the remaining twelve federations in the South, including those in Oklahoma and Indian Territory there are six hundred and forty-seven individual clubs with an estimated membership of over twenty-five thousand women, and this number is constantly increasing.

It would be useless to enumerate the lines of work in each federation, since they are almost identical in purpose, with slight differences in name, and vary but little from those of the General Federation.

Each Federation has brought into its work the new committees which seemed of greatest value for its Clubs.

The Art work consisted in the first place of studying of the growth of art and its different periods and forms of development. Many clubs have done excellent study-work before reaching the second stage of distributing through the schools prints of the world's greatest masterpieces, often with a description or a poem accompanying the picture for which it was written.

The Texas Federation "supports a Travelling Art Gallery, which each year, exhibits to club towns subscribing, a different school of art. This year the exhibition is of French masters. During the five months' circuit seventy-two clubs were visited, and over twenty-two thousand children given an opportunity of seeing artistic works and hearing them explained by a capable conductor who accompanies the collection."

In many instances the pictures sent to schools are an aid to nature study, being especially prepared for school use. These represent birds, beasts, fishes, plants and rocks and being printed in the natural colours are a great delight to the children in the public schools. The nature pictures do not pass from place to place but are a gift to the school receiving them and highly appreciated by the children.

In like manner the clubs devoted to the study of literature have been important factors in the spread of good literature in three ways, through the "traveling libraries;" to villages and isolated schools to the smaller towns in the establishment of free

libraries; and in the large towns by hearty co-operation with the Carnegie or any other city library. The traveling libraries go about among the country schools and villages, and are in charge of the teachers receiving them from the clubs. Tennessee has over one hundred traveling libraries and is constantly increasing the number. Texas has sixty five, and all of the other states are doing similar work. Arkansas has only recently undertaken library work but has one dozen libraries now traveling and is raising funds for a "Reciprocity Library." The latter corresponds with what in Georgia is called its Federation Library and consists of books of reference upon the subjects embraced by the federation committees — the different sections of this library go for a season to the club requesting the books as an aid to study. In Georgia a number of clubs have traveling libraries varying in number but with a total in the Federation approximating one hundred volumes. South Carolina also has one hundred libraries, while Kentucky reports eighty-four. The popularity of these books, the eagerness of their welcome where there is no other library is shown from the fact that the ones longest in circulation through the territory have become quite dilapidated, and several federations report that the traveling library committees need funds to replenish the sections even more than to fit out new libraries! In Georgia the valuable library and gardening work along the route of the Seaboard Air-Line R. R. was founded by and is still in charge of one of the charter members of the Georgia Federation.

Naturally from this library work there has sprung a desire to possess buildings properly equipped for this branch of the work as well as for many other uses which constantly arise for a gathering place. Consequently, each year sees an addition to the number of club houses where the meetings are held, the books of the circulating library kept for distribution, and whence the traveling libraries may start upon their journeys. These buildings are unpretentious, but truly artistic because well-adapted for the required uses and sufficiently ornamental to arouse the pride of all citizens in them. The writer knows one which is a beautiful log cabin and cost but six hundred dollars, yet it is the pride of the little town and a delight to passing travelers.

The club women of the South are also working for the improvement of our public schools, especially those in the rural dis-

tricts. Many scholarships in Normal Schools and Universities have been obtained by the club members and filled by some one whom they deemed worthy to be prepared as a thoroughly trained teacher. This step has been taken because women saw the need of better training for the teachers both for the sake of the pupils and that there might be an equivalent given for the better salaries which club women are striving to bring about for the country teachers who are generally far too poorly paid.

Kindergartens have become a part of woman's work in some of the larger towns as well as throughout the states and are becoming a more important part of the school system.

The Texas Federation has within the last two years put the kindergarten work among the standing committees. "Pioneer work is over with us and a State Kindergarten Association, two training schools, sixty kindergartens, and industrial and settlement work, besides the submitting of a bill to the legislature asking that this form of education be made a part of the public school system, have been the arduous labours of this untiring committee. Only one city however, El Paso, has succeeded in incorporating the kindergarten with the public schools."

The addition of manual training and Nature study to the curriculum of the rural schools is producing a revolution in the feeling of the children toward the schools. This, where properly carried out, does not increase the burden of studies for the children—instead, there is a perceptible gain in the mental alertness of a pupil whose hand also is allowed to learn new uses, and whose whole outlook on life is broadened by this addition.

Basketry, sewing and weaving have mingled with them gay threads of history and geography which will shine out more and more through the passing years, never to be forgotten. The whole wide world comes right into the schoolroom when the children realize that the raphia in their fingers came from Madagascar, and that it might have come from Borneo; those far away islands are nearby when one of the children has traced upon a globe the route from their school-house to the palm groves where the huge leaves grow from whose stems the fibre is stripped. In cooking, the children learn the relative values of foods as well as their preparation. It was while eating vegetable soup made by a lad of twelve, that the guests of one school were told that the corn from "out

West " contained an excess of fat-producing material while that raised in Georgia was more muscle-producing.

Work in Music is carried on very successfully in some of the Southern Federations—club women not only give their own attention to the best of music, but by means of scholarships obtained from those gifted in teaching, and by loans of music to the pupils, pass on the training to others.

In close connection with the school work is that of Household Economics—the department in which our club women study the very latest phases of the duties in and around our homes which are so vital to us and our children. The pure-food laws are just as important for the South as for any other part of the country and any bills of that nature receive the influence of the club women.

The work of Civic Improvement is one by which the women are waking the people of the South to the commercial as well as the artistic value of beauty in our towns, and the importance of perfect sanitation being the aim of every place. School Gardens and procuring parks for towns also come within the duties of this committee and these states are dotted with parks and gardens which show how effective this work has been.

Civil Service Reform is a subject which is still quite new to most of the Southern club women, as the committees on that subject have only been formed within the last two years—but already the women appreciate the subject and are doing good work. They are trying to create an enlightened public opinion which shall place the Civil Service of our country upon an equitable, honorable basis. None of the women in our country are better fitted to realize the value of the merit system than the women of the South, and it is hoped that they will wield a powerful influence in this direction. Not only from the ordinary view-point can woman see this subject, but also from her desire to place the Civil Service upon the same level of public esteem as the branches that work in war. The Army and the Navy have leaders who have been educated and maintained at the public expense; they give us protection from foreign foes, but how important it is that the men who preserve domestic peace, who guard our homes, and cities, and counties, shall also be men beyond reproach; that they shall be chosen for their fitness and then shall be sure of their retention in office "for life or good behaviour"; men who cannot be bought

by the powers of evil, and who shall be free from all fear lest fulfilling their duty may cost them their position!

The club women who used to study Shakespeare have been looking around them upon life's stage. They are finding through their study of civic conditions that an enormous number of life's players are performing their parts under adverse circumstances. Seeing this the club women of the South have joined their sisters all over the Union in demanding improvement in the industrial conditions of women and the abolition of Child Labor. In every state except Georgia* there is now protection for the little ones; to at least a slight extent, from the greed of unrighteous employers and the laziness of loafing fathers.

The enforcement of the existing Child Labor laws, and their improvement as soon as possible, and the passage of one in Georgia — also the passage of a Compulsory Education law, as a great preventive of Child Labor are two of the most momentous subjects in the work of the club women of the South. In spite of the laws the number of children who are working by day and by night in the South is increasing. Observation shows that even these few years of manufacturing development of the South have brought deterioration to many of the white children. The wife of the manager of a mill said to the superintendent that a certain small girl at work did not look as if she were twelve years old. "Yes — she's fifteen, I know, for she has worked for me for years in another town!" thus himself proving the dwarfing effect of cotton mill work upon young children. Club women are doing their best in this work for the children — but is it not all for them? The public lectures given in the public schools of New Orleans, by a club woman, were a great aid in preventing the further spread of the yellow fever because it enabled the parents and children to understand the necessity for quarantine, and for the cleansing of the yards and streets. Perhaps when the parents of mill-children learn that the government is determined to protect their children from working while infants, and why they forbid it, they too will acquire a new dignity and keep the law.

Says a prominent official in the North — "While men have been quarreling over the money question and the tariff, the women have

* At time of writing this was true. At proofreading, a very excellent bill has been passed by the Legislature of Georgia.

been safeguarding humanity" — and they have done it as club women without regard to other affiliations — it is the greatest force for making us all one, without regard to creed or politics — and it is equally true of the work in the South.

This is shown by the work done for the proper treatment of minors who have broken the law. The efforts of the club women of Atlanta, Georgia were principally responsible for the establishment of a reformatory in their county. Two years later, aroused by the visit of the National Conference of Charities and Correction, they were influential in creating the public opinion which demanded a Juvenile Court which is now in successful operation, saving children from contact with criminals in the stockade and chain-gang, and preparing them for useful citizenship. A lad who had formerly been very troublesome was asked by his mother, "What makes you so good now that you are on probation?" The quick reply was, "I have to be or the Judge would lose his job!" That is the secret of the work for the children having Judges and probation officers of tact, who are filled with real love for children and a desire to save them. In Texas the women are working to procure state legislation installing the Juvenile Courts. In the city of Dallas the club women themselves raised the money for the payment of a police matron in order to show the civic authorities the value of having such protection for the women and girls who are under arrest.

The interest in these subjects is deepening in all our federations and the work done is slowly increasing in effectiveness.

The work of the "Arts and Crafts" committees throughout the south has developed the fact that there are in farm homes, sometimes far from towns, women of marked ability in certain lines of handiwork. In Kentucky, Tennessee, and Georgia many of the women in the mountains are still able to do the intricate weaving of days long-gone-by, and they are greatly pleased to find appreciation of their work and a market for it. "Drawn-work" too is done equal to the best sent from Mexico and sold to or through club women, while the "shuck hats" are not only artistically beautiful by being made in graceful shapes, but of home-grown materials.

"Social Settlement" work is found in New Orleans and is wonderfully successful there, but the only Southern Federation

which has a Social Settlement committee is Tennessee. Its work in Walker's Valley is not only useful in itself but has by its value secured the founding of a similar settlement in the Tennessee mountains under the care of the Federation of Massachusetts. That fact brings us to one of the most beautiful effects of club work—namely, the unity of feeling with the women of one whole country. Nominally divided by sectional lines they know none such. Massachusetts has her foster-child in Tennessee, and another in Georgia where her Federation provides the Industrial Training in the Model School at Cass Station which is appropriately called "The Massachusetts-Georgia Model School."

The description of this work is almost a portrayal of its effect. We can claim, without fear of contradiction, that no Southern club woman has ever expressed her regret at having "wasted four hours at a meeting of the State Federation" as a popular author has quoted an Eastern friend. The club to which a Southern woman belongs may be purely literary, or devote itself to travel-study, but she has nevertheless felt the influence of the work of her Federation. The children in the little country schools of whom she knew nothing before, have now become of deep interest to her through the work of her State Federation.

There was no manual training in the country schools of Georgia, and no emphasis laid upon it in any school in the state until two scholarships had been presented to the Georgia Federation by great Northern training schools. When the diplomas for domestic science and manual training had been earned, the faithful work done by the two young ladies thus fitted, Miss Emily Wilburn and Miss Isabel Thursby, proved a valuable object lesson to the educational authorities of the state. The two teachers now in charge of the Massachusetts-Georgia Model School were trained in the State Normal School at Athens. The day of complete training for eye and head and hand and heart has come to the children of Georgia through its Federation of Women's Clubs. Surely a worthy effect of club work. Similar work in all of the Southern states has had an effect upon the children, but perhaps even more upon the women. Without neglecting their homes, without becoming mannish or losing one charm of their womanhood, the club women of the South have become broadened and their work has made them a recognized force wherever they dwell. Their as-

sistance is sought for every movement which may be helpful to the state or country and they no longer shrink from expressing themselves upon the subjects vital to society.

Texas stands for us all when "The Lone Star Federation asserts that it stands for the highest and truest type of womanhood — that which lends her voice as well as her hand."

Hospitals, almshouses — or "county-farms" and all public institutions for the unfortunate are coming more quickly than supposed into their proper status of public trusts, and largely because of the interest of the women. There is a constant increase in the demands made upon the women's clubs by those most interested in civic progress, and the help given to the clubs by the authorities of the towns is an equal proof of the appreciation of their work.

Women's clubs in the South have brought the women into partnership with their husbands and brothers in the civic responsibility of caring for the unfortunate, and of raising the standard of thought and action about all other "national housekeeping" problems.

As the ranks of church workers contain many club women, those associations are brought more closely into touch with the life outside of their immediate line of work, and in the South the reciprocal interest is very great. There certainly are times when the decision must be made as to which is the more important work of the moment but the conscientious club woman makes her decision calmly for club work is also God's work for home — for our land, for all who need us.